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ABSTRACT

These remarks are based on the Association's cooperative library study finding that two-thirds of the southeastern libraries are already participating in cooperative programs. Libraries must now exploit these avenues of cooperation, especially with the Library of Congress. Cooperative projects in automation such as CONSER, COMARC, and RLG are currently in progress and others, such as the National Union Catalog data base for the Register of Additional Locations and the automated process information file, will provide prime networking opportunities for further development. Data base manufacturers should standardize search strategies to help make these new tools affordable to library users. The Library of Congress is combining its two computing systems into one that can be more fully utilized by the readers. (Author/AP)

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# Sharing the Riches -- Cooperation and the Library of Congress

Remarks by William J. Welsh
The Deputy Librarian of Congress

Southeastern Library Association
November 5, 1976

Mary Edna Anders said in the conclusion of her survey that libraries in the southeast "have too few dollars and lag too far behind too many averages to afford the luxury of independent and competitive growth." She urged librarians to adopt the approach of the National Association of Regional Council's "Declaration of Interdependence."

She was wrong on one point. It's not just the southeast, which is actually enjoying remarkable growth both in economic and intellectual resources. It's libraries everywhere. No one is self-sufficient. No one is a library of last resort. We are all libraries of first resort. We are all dependent.

But I don't believe this is bad news. I think this is the news we were waiting for and preparing for and perhaps even, in a perverse way, hoping for. Because as we have gathered more and more books onto our shelves and as we've delved into computers and toyed with microfiche, we knew that sooner or later it would be too much for us--that the Indian newspapers, the Soviet medical treatises, and the manuscripts and state documents would bury us before we knew what we had. We needed help. The Library of Congress needed help. Harvard needed help. Spartanburg County Public Library needed help, and yes, even the Knoxville Public Library needed help.

But how do you ask for it, and who's going to give it?

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I think that's what is meant by interdependence.

We have been toying with various forms of cooperation among libraries for decades. Our most successful recent attempts were centered around labor-saving devices such as automated cataloging. In some cases cooperative acquisitions programs were also possible. But in general our efforts were tentative, and our commitments short-term.

On the other hand, you could say this was simply the developmental stage and that bigger things are to come. And that is what I am going to suggest here tonight. The Anders study indicates that over half the public libraries surveyed were part of some cooperative program, either for interlibrary loans or for reference referrals. Of 360 academic libraries, 239 were part of at least one and often several different cooperative programs. Cooperation is no strange phenomenon here.

But the question is where do we go now? How do we take proper advantage of the progress we have made? And this is perhaps where the Library of Congress will be of help.

We have surely a more pressing need for cooperation than many libraries. Last year we added 1,886,325 individual pieces to our collection, which now numbers some 72 million items. We cataloged 240,000 titles, filed 3,000,000 catalog cards, maintained 125,000 serial subscriptions. We hope three years from now to begin moving into the new Madison Building. That will get our catalogers out of the bookstacks and our map collection back from the suburbs. We will get the books off the floor and onto the shelves at last. But for how long? We cannot continue

to expand indefinitely. We too must find a place in the community. We can no longer continue along, blindly collecting and cataloging. We must join you, and we must all share the burden and the riches.

That brings me to the riches.

As you know, there's a new administration in the Library of Congress. We are in the midst of taking an extensive look at ourselves and what we've been doing and what we should have been doing. We have an internal task force of eleven mid-level staff who are charged with delivering a comprehensive planning document to the Librarian by January. This document will analyze the role of the Library and draw up a blueprint for the future -- or perhaps it will be of several possible futures.

In addition to this internal analysis we are also soliciting the views of various specific professions, including the library profession, through the medium of outside advisory panels. These advisory groups are examining the Library from the point of view of specific disciplines -- what could or should we be doing for economists or publishers or historians of science? And they will also submit their reports to the Librarian in January.

So by early 1977 we hope to have a fairly accurate picture of the Library, both as our own staff see it and as the outside world perceives us. This, I might add, is the first time an extensive examination of the role of the Library of Congress has ever been carried out.

The one premise we have started with in this inquiry is that the Library of Congress is this country's national library. That ought

not be a very revolutionary assumption, but it ought to be said at the outset anyway. And as the national library we have certain obligations. In a sense we must earn that title and keep earning it. We have to take an active role in the community. We have to be the place where your hopes and your ideas can be fostered and bear fruit for all of us.

With that in mind, let me describe some of the things we have been doing at the Library that affect you, some of the attitudes that motivate them, and some of our ideas about where we are going next.

The Library of Congress has been seemingly collecting everything it could get its hands on since the 1870s and has been cataloging as much of this material as possible since the turn of the century. We have become a huge bibliographic warehouse that stocks the knowledge of the entire world and sends out an endless parts list to our colleagues. The institution has grown, at least physically, beyond anyone's wildest dreams. We have developed new techniques, with the computer, with microfiche, with telecommunications. But where is it going?

I believe it is time we took stock of what we have done and tried to put the pieces together into a coherent whole. I believe this is the proper moment in history, when we are running out of space and you are running out of money and all of us are running out of time, to take a new look at cooperation.

Over the years LC has become known as the great purveyor of catalog cards, and now of MARC tapes. We ground out the cataloging, and you tried to adapt our product to your needs and the needs of your

readers. We remained in relative isolation. But the computer and telecommunications are changing this. Two years ago the National Commission's proposal for a nationwide library network seemed utopian -- or perhaps the self-interested dream of the hardware salesmen. Today it doesn't seem unattainable.

Let's look at three cooperative projects the Library currently has underway, with an eye not to their details, which are complex, but to their purpose, which is relatively straight-forward.

First, we are working with the Research Libraries Group (at the moment with Columbia University and the Research Libraries of the New York Public Library) to develop the procedures for RLG members to have on-line access to the MARC data base at LC. Second, we are already in the operational stage in the CONSER project, a multi-library serials data-base building project now housed in the Ohio College Library Center. Third, we are now conducting a pilot machine-readable cataloging project called COMARC (COoperative MARC), using other institutions to convert existing LC card copy to machine-readable form in the MARC format.

Now what are the implications of these activities?

In the first phase of the project with the Research Libraries Group, a direct hookup has been installed between the RLG computer at New York Public Library and the LC computer. Acquisitions and cataloging staff of the RLG libraries first search the RLG data base to see if the record they want is in this file. If not, the search query is forwarded to the LC computer for searching the LC MARC data base, and if the record

is found, it is transmitted on-line, computer to computer, from LC to the New York Public Library to become part of the requesting institution's cataloging file.

The RLG experiment is the first time in the library world that two institutions have engaged in direct, machine-to-machine exchange of bibliographic information. The initial purpose is to explore the economics of this exchange -- to compare telecommunication costs with storage and retrieval costs -- in other words, to analyze the potential benefits and pitfalls of networking.

The first phase of the RLG experiment has been jointly funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Carnegie Corporation and is under way. The other two phases, still in the proposal-writing stage, call for the development of a mechanism for connecting numerous utilities (starting initially with LC and RLG as a model). The results of this experiment should show us how we can develop a national telecommunications network for bibliographical exchange.

CONSER, which has been under way for some time now, is the cooperative effort to build a bibliographic data base for serials. Using the OCLC computer facility to store a number of large serials data bases including the LC MARC serials, the Minnesota Union List of Serials, and the file of the National Library of Canada, CONSER is intended to provide a central source of serials cataloging information in North America. The Library of Congress will take on the management and operation of the CONSER file in 1977 or 1978.

The third pilot study with networking implications is COMARC. The basic idea behind COMARC is to allow institutions to convert conventional LC cataloging copy -- printed cards, proof sheets, or NUC page copy -- to MARC records for input into an institution's data base. A library converts the card copy to machine-readable form and sends the record in the MARC Communications format to LC, where it is processed, compared against the official catalog, updated if required and redistributed through the MARC subscription service.

At this point still a pilot study funded by CLR, COMARC is essentially a study of the feasibility of a shared cataloging effort in which other institutions enter non-MARC LC cataloging copy into a communal data base which is managed by LC. If a balanced sharing of responsibilities can be worked out, and if enough data can be entered to make this a workable file, I need not dwell on the possibilities.

At the same time that LC is working with other libraries in cooperative ventures such as CONSER, COMARC and the RLG project, LC is also moving ahead with a National Union Catalog data base for the Register of Additional Locations. The Register is now available in printed and microform and our staff have the ability to search the file on-line. In addition, new location data are being received in machine-readable form from other library systems for automatic posting to the file which currently contains approximately 1.75 million titles with 11.75 million location reports. Obviously, here is a prime networking opportunity waiting for further development.

At the same time that we are reaching out in these exploratory projects to other libraries and networks, we are expanding the use of the MARC data base internally. We are developing methods for searching the data base beyond the existing author/title and LC card points of entry, and we are opening this service to outside users on a fee basis. We are automating our process information file and making it accessible as part of the MARC search service. We have begun adding and correcting MARC records on-line instead of in batch mode. In other words, the Library is becoming more fully automated with catalogers and acquisitions staff working straight from the terminal. And it is only a matter of time before this type of information can be shared on-line with other libraries through networking.

I hope that what I have outlined will pave the way toward a practical networking of libraries with LC as only one of many partners.

But there is one problem with this networking idea. It still sounds like a labor-saving device to save catalogers. When we have a conference on automation, I rarely hear the word "reader" or "reference" mentioned. Who are we doing all this networking for?

As a purveyor of automated information retrieval systems myself, I took ironic pleasure at the conclusions of the Jeff Gardner and David Wax study of on-line bibliographic services summarized in the September 15 LJ. They observed that until some standardization of search strategies and language is forced upon the data base manufacturers these remarkable tools will continue to be too expensive for the ordinary user.

Few libraries, they observed, can afford to keep specialists in computer searching on the payroll and few researchers have the patience to thread their way through the idiosyncracies of a half-dozen different search strategies.

The study was published at about the time the Library of Congress was wrestling with the internal mechanics of combining its automation activities under one roof. Up to that point we had been developing two competing systems -- one for Congress and one for catalogers and none for the general reader.

I hope now we are on the way to creating a more coherent approach to automation -- one that will be useful not just to specialists but to library patrons as well.

We are also engaged in other experiments that have networking potential and that start with the demands of the reader in mind.

Since early June we have been providing direct telephone reference service to five library networks, and we will soon expand this service to ten networks. The understanding is that the Library of Congress will act as a final resource for questions not answerable by the network participants. So far we have not been overwhelmed, but the questions coming in have been of sufficient difficulty to make us feel this is a worthy experiment. About ten to fifteen percent have been bibliographic and the rest have varied from such things as background information on Underwriters Laboratories and the source for a harpsichord

transcription mentioned on a record jacket. We expect to run this pilot through January and to include about ten networks in the sample.

Our science librarians have created a national referral center for science and technology which is based on a computer data base of institutions that have agreed to answer public inquiries relating to specific fields of interest. This service is open to the public at large. A person can telephone in to our science reading room and ask a question; the librarian will put him on hold and query the computer, then return to the phone and, if an answer is found, tell him whom to call to get the information needed. This is in a sense the ultimate development of the public library's citizen referral center, but instead of giving you the mayor's office, we give you the National Dry Cleaning Institute or a university research office.

Next week we will be the host for an international meeting to consider the feasibility of a machine-readable short-title catalog of 18th century books. Depending on how the project takes form, this could be a prototype for further easily edited lists of rare materials that include location data and information useful to scholars.

So where are we amid this clutter of activities? How does it fit together?

By the early 1980s the Library of Congress will have moved into the Madison Building and have freed the existing main catalog from its cabinets by publishing it in book form. All current cataloging will be done for all languages on-line. LC will be in effect fully automated.

At the same time our services to readers will have increased substantially. We will have reclaimed our scholars' study facilities and have opened up our collection to new readers. We will have adapted our automated tools to the needs of our patrons as well as our catalogers. Our subject headings will be flexible and our filing rules understandable. Well, we hope they will be, anyway.

And these services will be available to you, because they won't be possible without your help and your support. We need you to create cooperative networks -- not just for book processing but also for reference work and information transfer. We need you to provide the framework for us to work in and live in.

If we are to cooperate, the Library of Congress needs your help in cataloging the world's knowledge. It needs your help in locating obscure materials. It needs your help in finding the one person who knows the answer to the unanswerable reference question. Because if we are to be the national library, then you must be our nation. We cannot exist without you. We have no purpose without you. We must all share the burden and the riches.

Bringing in the Sheaves